

# Encuentro

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## UNDERSTANDING RESPONSE TO PICTUREBOOKS

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### Abstract

This paper uses findings from an empirical study<sup>1</sup> in the field of language didactics to discuss the importance of valuing different responses to picturebooks in an EFL context, demonstrating how these responses can support language development in English. Making reference to just one of the picturebooks used in the study, *Good Night Gorilla!* (Rathmann, 1996), a title chosen for its repetitive verbal text but complex picture-word dynamic, this paper describes how children responded according to a grounded theory of literary understanding. Discussion highlights how, during repeated read alouds, children used both their L1 and English to respond to the picturebook, engaging in meaning-making strategies which supported personal significances and multiple interpretations. The discussion closes with recommendations for classrooms where picturebooks are used in EFL contexts of low exposure.

**Keywords:** picturebooks, response, literary understanding, repeated read alouds, linguistic repertoire;

### Resumen

Este artículo presenta los resultados de un estudio empírico dentro del campo de la enseñanza de lenguas para analizar la importancia de valorar distintas respuestas a los libros álbum en inglés en un contexto de la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL), y así demostrar cómo esas respuestas respaldan el desarrollo de la lengua inglesa. Haciendo referencia a uno de los libros álbum utilizados en el estudio, *Good Night Gorilla!* (Rathmann, 1996), título elegido por su narrativa repetitiva y por sus gráficos complejos y dinámicos, el artículo describe cómo los niños respondieron de acuerdo con una teoría de comprensión literaria. El análisis resalta cómo, durante repetidas lecturas en voz alta, los niños utilizaron su lengua L1 e inglés para responder al libro álbum, participando en estrategias de comprensión que apoyaron significados personales y múltiples interpretaciones. El análisis concluye con recomendaciones para el aula en la que se utilicen los libros álbum en contextos de poca exposición al inglés.

**Palabras clave:** Libros álbum, respuesta, comprensión literaria, repetidas lecturas en voz alta, repertorio lingüístico.

### 1. Introduction: the multimodal affordances of picturebooks

A picturebook by definition contains two modes of communication, the visual text and the verbal text. These two texts inter-animate (Meek, 1992), creating gaps for readers to fill as they interpret the way pictures and words come together to create meaning. There is consensus, in the world of children's literature, that the different picture-word relationships within picturebooks range from “symmetrical”, telling the same story and thus synchronizing, through to “contradictory”, a complex telling of different stories, (Golden, 1990; Agosto, 1999; Nikolajeva & Scott, 2000), despite contention that the inherent qualities of pictures and words produce a telling that can never be the same as the showing, (Lewis, 2001). The premise that the picture-word dynamic in the simpler, symmetrical inter-animation is considered less demanding on the reader is proposed by Agosto (1999) and more recently Baptista's (2008) research supports the argument that

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<sup>1</sup> Mourão, 2012a

picturebooks with little or no inter-animation make use of only one side of our brains, leaving readers “passive” (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006: 17). To this date, there is little research, which connects this discussion to the field of foreign language learning. For sure, the visual text is recognised as developing visual literacy and art appreciation (Dunn, 2003) as well as providing access to cultural representations of the other (Ellis & Brewster, 2002). However, when selecting picturebooks for foreign language contexts the illustrations are often considered a mere support for the verbal text, valued for their synchronizing information only (Ellis & Brewster, 2002). The rich opportunity for developing thinking skills and creating interpretations from the “gaps” (Iser, 1978) left between the pictures and words is apparently ignored. This approach is shifting (see Bland, 2013) but empirical research, which investigates how different picture-word dynamics affect language learning is practically non-existent.

This article contributes to filling a void. It begins with a discussion around reader response criticism, highlighting a theory of literary understanding which provides a set of categories for understanding response. These categories are then used to discuss the picturebook *Good Night Gorilla!* (Rathmann, 1996), sharing results from an empirical study with a group of L1 Portuguese pre-primary children learning English.

## **2. Reader response criticism**

Reader response criticism is a literary theory which focuses on the reader and on the meaning they extract from a text. The theories of Rosenblatt and Iser are regularly cited when discussing response to picturebooks not for their reference to response to illustrated texts, for they make none, but to the grounding theories they provided relating the reader to the text. Iser's theories describe an “implied reader”, who is controlled by the text through the use of gaps or indeterminacies (Iser, 1978). Communication between reader and text begins when the reader fills the gaps. The gaps left by the inter-animation of picture and word are good examples of this within picturebooks.

Rosenblatt's work focuses on the reader and their engagement and involvement in meaning making through the text. Her notion of “aesthetic reading” (Rosenblatt, 1995: 31) requires that the reader direct their attention towards the affective aspects of the reading experience. Rosenblatt's view was that a reader comes to a book “from life” (1995: 34) and her theory of a “two-way ‘transactional’ relationship” (1995: ix), between reader and text, creating another text from our own personal reactions and experiences with the original has been highly influential in school contexts. Fish (1980), influenced by the socio-constructivist theories of Vygotsky, proposes the creation of “interpretative communities” incorporating Rosenblatt's idea of aesthetic reading. In his view, it is the context, the interpretive community, which is responsible “both for the shape of the reader's activities and for the texts those activities produce” (Fish, 1980: 322).

From these theories we can summarise that readers of picturebooks should be encouraged to think about what the pictures show and the words tell, filling the gaps with personal interpretations. Readers can also be encouraged to interpret a text together with their peers, and through discussing and sharing of personal experiences create their own texts – ones that reflect their community of learning.

## **3. Reader response and picturebooks**

The first research into response to picturebooks appeared in the 1990s and centered on a need to understand how children created meaning with and appreciated picturebooks (see Arizpe & Styles, 2003; Kiefer, 1993; Madura, 1998, Sipe, 2000). These studies are diverse in nature and create very different categories resulting

in an absence of basic meta-language with which to discuss multimodal texts like picturebooks (Arizpe & Styles, 2008). Nonetheless, Sipe's grounded theory of literary understanding (2000; 2008), developed from observing young children (mostly under 7-year olds) interacting with a large number of picturebooks (over 300 titles), is by far the most complete of any account so far. It portrays children responding according to five conceptual categories, which in turn fit into three basic literary impulses, see Figure 1.

Literary impulses	Enactments
Hermeneutic impulse	An analytical response An intertextual response
Personal impulse	A personal response
Aesthetic impulse	A transparent response A performative response

Figure 1: Literary impulses and their enactments (adapted Sipe, 2000: 270)

Taking into consideration that picturebooks provide the opportunities for multiple response and in particular picturebooks where the picture-word dynamic is more complex, the next section describes the picturebook which is the focus of this study, *Good Night Gorilla!* (Rathmann). It then briefly relates the study, which incorporated Sipe's theory of literary understanding as a guide to understanding how children responded to certain picturebooks.

#### 4. The picturebook *Good Night Gorilla!*<sup>2</sup>

*Good Night, Gorilla!* was originally written and illustrated by Peggy Rathmann for the North American market in 1994. It is the story of a zookeeper, Joe, on his evening rounds at the zoo. The visual and verbal texts both show and tell us that he says "Good night" to his animals, and makes his way home, gets into bed, says a final "Good night" to his wife, rolls over and goes to sleep. However, the illustrations also show a multitude of additional narratives, or story fragments, the main one being the gorilla taking the zookeeper's keys and opening all the animal cages. As the gorilla releases the animals, they follow the zookeeper home, walk into his house and settle down to sleep in his bedroom. When the wife realizes they are there, she takes them all back to the zoo. The twist to the story is that the gorilla and his mouse are allowed to return home, snuggle into bed and sleep between the zookeeper and his wife.

The picture-word dynamic is a complex one, with the words, when they exist, representing only one of many narratives. The pictures diverge showing us a number of other stories or story fragments. On the seven wordless spreads the pictures clearly lead the narrative. I would propose that they lead throughout, though where words exist, the repetitive salutation "good night" plus noun creates an irony resulting from "perspectival counterpoint" (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2000: 233), the words and pictures showing and telling two different perspectives of the same story.

There are two mentions of *Good Night, Gorilla!* in ELT literature. The first is by Linse, (2007: 49) who describes the picturebook as being richly illustrated, with "a sequence of pictures which could very easily stand alone as a wordless tale about zoo animals, the zookeeper and his wife". She recommends this picturebook for the "predictability" of the very minimal verbal text, placed in speech bubbles, consisting of

<sup>2</sup> For those readers interested in seeing some of the pages of this picturebook, there is a blog post which describes it here: <http://picturebooksinelt.blogspot.pt/2011/06/thats-one-cheeky-gorilla.html>

“Good Night” and one of the following nouns, “Gorilla”, “Elephant”, “Lion”, “Hyena”, “Giraffe”, “Armadillo”, “Dear” and “Zoo”. The speech bubbles contribute to a print-salience and this is said to direct and attract more attention to the verbal text within the illustrated page (Justice et al, 2005). However, as we have seen from the description of the visual text above, the narratives are both shown (through the illustrations) and told (through the words), and much of what is shown is unpredictable. Linse (2007) makes no mention of the multiple narratives shown in the illustrations, which are what make this picturebook particularly interesting with regards children’s response. Bland (2013), taking these additional narratives seriously, describes *Good Night Gorilla!* as an example of “radical children’s literature” (48), and applauds the visual text for its language learning affordances.

## 5. The study

### 5.1. Research methods

The study took a qualitative stance to enquiry, following the interpretative paradigm of “[understanding] the meaning that people are constructing in their everyday *situated actions*” (Walsh et al, 1993: 465). Three Portuguese pre-schools were selected as convenience samples, all participating in English lessons that took place twice a week, lasting for thirty minutes and amounting to approximately 40 hours of instruction over the year – a context of low exposure. A total of 64 children, between 56 and 79 months, were involved in the study. Data sources included questionnaires to parents, interviews with pre-school educators, content notes from English sessions, reports and anecdotal notes from discussions with the pre-school educators, transcriptions from observations, together with field notes and a research diary, and detailed analysis of the picturebook’s structure and format.

The children were observed from January to June 2009 interacting with English picturebooks of different word-picture dynamics and with or without repetitive verbal texts during their English lessons. At the beginning of the observation sequence, children had had approximately twelve hours of English lessons. Observations occurred during teacher-led read alouds over seven consecutive English lessons. Here spontaneous responses were encouraged, the teacher mediated between the book and the children, reading the verbal text in English, occasionally prompting predictions, and fielding responses to the illustrations and verbal text as they arose. Spontaneity was valued, and initiation, response, and feedback exchanges were avoided. The picturebooks were left in the class library between the English lessons so that the children could interact with and browse through the books in their own time. Each observation was audio- and video-recorded and transcribed. The main corpus is made up of transcriptions from three different picturebooks. The focus for this paper is on the corpus pertaining to the picturebook, *Good Night Gorilla!*.

### 5.2. Data analysis

Transcriptions for *Good Night Gorilla!* were made up of seven repeated read alouds (RRAs) in each school. The unit of analysis was the “utterance” considered a unit of activity, “an ensemble of action that counts for others as an attempt by the actor to ‘give’ information of some sort”, constructed from speech, visible bodily action or a combination of the two modalities (Kendon, 2004: 7). The children’s utterances were divided into spontaneous utterances, also called message units (Martinez & Teale, 1989) or topic units, the latter being “a single message unit or a series of message units directed towards the same aspect of the story feature or related feature” (p. 134). Once marked, the utterances in the RRAs were analyzed following an adaptation of Sipe’s grounded theory of literary understanding (Sipe, 2000; 2008).

## 6. Findings and discussion

The RRAs of *Good Night Gorilla!* prompted physical and verbal responses, the latter authentic, lively talk in both the L1 and the L2. Children responded according to Sipe's literary impulses and their respective enactments (Sipe, 2000; 2008). An overwhelming majority of responses were of the analytical type, (ranging between the three groups of children from 75% - 85% of the responses); the transparent response was the next most evident, (from 5% to 15%); followed by the personal response, the intertextual response and the performative response, all under 2%. These responses resemble the results found in Sipe's multiple studies, and demonstrated that the children made meaning using the illustrations, the words, and the book as a culturally produced object during the RRAs. Children picked up the verbal text and joined in with the telling of the picturebook very quickly, however the illustrations afforded a variety of responses and resulted in additional use of the L2. As the analytical response was the largest response I shall begin by describing it, highlighting how children interpreted the picturebook and their eventual L2 use.

### 6.1. The Analytical Response

The analytical response includes five subcategories, four from Sipe's original theory, these being analysis of narrative meaning; analysis of illustrations; analysis of story language; analysis of book as object; and an additional category, analysis of codes. I shall look at each category separately and discuss the children's response and the implications for L2 use and development.

#### 6.1.1. Analysis of narrative meaning

Analysis of narrative meaning represented between 8% and 14% of the children's responses in this category. This response is representative of the children demonstrating an understanding of what was happening through looking at the illustrations and listening to the verbal text, however in most cases it is obvious that the children were more responsive to the visual aspects of the picturebook. The children predicted and confirmed predictions, described plots, made inferences about characters' thoughts, motivations and feelings, recognized cause and effect and constructed a narrative through discussion.

##### 6.1.1.1. Prediction

Prediction only occurs successfully during the first RRA: the children do not know what will happen so they are able to make predictions based on their understanding of the verbal text and what they see in the visual text. The most obvious support for prediction is the front cover, and children used the illustrations there to predict the setting, and the main characters of the story. In addition, *Good Night, Gorilla!* contains a visual structure which supports prediction in the first half of the picturebook, where illustrative foreshadowing (giving clues to what might happen next) makes us want to turn the page. An example in opening<sup>3</sup> 03 shows the gorilla following the zookeeper, but looking back at the elephant in his cage. The children predicted that he would open the elephant's cage, which is what they saw upon turning the page. They also noticed the keys slowly disappearing from the key ring as each cage was opened and when one was left in opening 05, they correctly predicted the gorilla would let one more animal out of its cage.

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<sup>3</sup> Picturebooks do not have page numbers, so each double spread (two facing pages) is referred to as an opening.

#### 6.1.1.2. Describing plots

If predictions were particular to the first RRA, describing plots occurred in all subsequent RRAs. Plot descriptions derived from the visual aspects of the plot of *Good Night, Gorilla!* and focused on those happenings which the children found most memorable. This response occurred throughout the book. An example being “*A girafa vai baixar o pescoço*” (Trans: The giraffe is going to bend it’s neck), which was mentioned in relation to opening 07, where the animals are traipsing across the grass towards the zookeeper’s house and the children knew that the giraffe’s long neck meant he would have to bend right down to get into the house. These plot descriptions were, once again, almost all in the L1, with occasional inserting of L2 content words like “mouse”, gorilla” or “giraffe”.

#### 6.1.1.3. Children described and made inferences about characters

In the illustrations the zookeeper's eyes are almost always shown closed as he went on his evening rounds and children inferred that he didn't notice the animals following him, as he was too sleepy. However, the best example of inferring mood was when the children saw the wife's wide-open eyes in opening 13. School 02 needed little prompting and described her as being “surprised” from RRA 2 onwards.

In School 03, an episode shows one child in particular being able to interpret the situation from the perspective of the two characters, the wife and the gorilla, when he advises the gorilla to “*Foge!*” (Trans Run!), because he thought the woman looked cross. This response was repeated during the following RRAs, and gradually moved from being given in the L1 to being called out in the L2, with the child, and several other children, calling out “Run, run Gorilla!”.

This is a clear example of that which I hinted at earlier, children's L1 comments acting as a mediator between the world of the book and the new language. During the RRAs, this particular child’s spontaneous response in the L1 was revisited, and each time he called out “*Foge*” the teacher translated or recast the utterance into the L2. This repetition, the child's unfailing mention of “*Foge*” and the regular translations / recasts created the affordances which eventually enabled the L2 to be used naturally on this spread.

#### 6.1.1.4. Children recognized cause and effect

A classic cause and effect example is commenting on the fact that the zookeeper had his eyes closed and this is why he wasn't aware that the animals were escaping. Other aspects related to the visual story fragments were responsible for quite long discussions. Children in School 01 noticed that the mouse in opening 07 was at the front of the line of animals, who were following the zookeeper across the grass to his house, but by opening 08, inside the house, he was penultimate. They discussed this at length and decided that he was having problems with the banana he was pulling because it was too heavy. The excerpt below shows their discussion and also some possible solutions. Notice how they repeatedly insert “mouse”, and other animal names, as well as the “banana” into the sentences in English.

Child 1 *E o mouse já não está à frente* (Trans: And the mouse isn’t in front any more)

Teacher *Não . por que é que tu achas que não está à frente* (Trans: No, why do you think he isn’t in front?)

Child 1 *Porque ele não conseguiu muito bem* (Trans: Because he couldn’t very well)  
(...)

Child 2 *O a mouse devia pôr a banana no chão* (Trans: the mouse should put the banana on the floor)

Child 3 *A mouse devia agarrar a banana* (Trans: The mouse should hold the banana)  
(...)

Child 1 A giraffe *devia levar* a banana (Trans: The giraffe should take the banana)  
Child 4 O lion *devia pôr* a banana *na boca* (Trans: The lion should put it in his mouth)  
Teacher The lion? Put the banana in his mouth?

(School 01, *Good Night, Gorilla!*, RRA 7, opening 08)

Sipe & Brightman (2009) have researched how children make sense of page breaks in picturebooks, inviting them to speculate what had happened, to encourage verbalization of what they might already be thinking about. The above excerpt shows discussion around the page break between opening 07 and 08. The fact that the child mentioned the mouse was no longer at the front, demonstrates he was considering this already and the teacher's question about what had happened led to further discussion. The responses that followed focused on the cause and its possible solution, which became quite comical, that other animals, stronger than the mouse, should be carrying the banana.

#### 6.1.1.5. Children constructed narrative through discussion

The story fragments, in particular, created real reasons for discussion, as we saw in the previous example. The children talked about how the balloon came loose and floated away; why each animal had a toy in its cage; they questioned the banana skin in the last opening wondering who had eaten it; they talked about the moon; they discussed the importance of the coloured keys matching the cages; they peered at animals photographs on the house walls and wondered why they were there and who the animals were. Individual comments from children prompted others to think about the illustrations and make their own constructions. One particular illustration in opening 13 shows a photograph of the zookeeper and his wife holding a baby gorilla. Children looked at this and decided that this was why the gorilla was allowed back into the bedroom and into the bed, as if he was their baby.

Analysis of narrative meaning is an essential part of response to picturebooks. The examples I have shared demonstrate children being actively involved in meaning making, related to both the book and their learning environment. The children's comments are often in the L1, but they provide a solid base for which to develop the L2. In many cases this developed over the RRAs into comments in the children's L1 with occasional insertions of an L2 word the children knew, or were prompted to use. Children did not have the language proficiency to make complex statements in the L2 only. However, by commenting the children were laying the ground for possible later L2 use, in particular if their L1 comments were taken up, responded to and paraphrased into the L2 equivalent. We saw an example of this when a child called out for the gorilla to "run".

#### 6.1.2. Analysis of illustrations

This sub-category focuses entirely on children's responses to the illustrations, and constitutes the greatest number of responses in all schools (69%, 58% and 62% respectively). Response in this sub-category entailed the children demonstrating a close scrutiny of the visual, e.g. identifying, labelling objects and describing actions.

##### 6.1.2.1. Identifying and labeling

Yaden (1988) describes children who are not yet reading as expecting everything in the illustrations to mean something. And indeed identifying and labelling represented between 65% and 72% of responses in this category. Children constantly labelled items in the illustrations - the zoo animals, which were also part of the verbal text, as well as the visual elements of the story fragments. Identifying and labelling continued

throughout all the RRAs. There were often multiple callouts with several children identifying and labelling what they could see in each opening, e.g. “*Tá ali a mouse*” (Trans: There’s a mouse). As with previous examples, labels were given using both the L1 and the L2 and consistently the animals’ names were inserted into an L1 sentence, as in the example.

Identifying parts of the illustration, which individuals considered relevant, was also typical and often became a routine part of interacting with each spread. The repeated returning to and identifying or describing certain aspects of the picturebook supports Yaden’s (1988) suggestion that children savour selected points of a picturebook, as adults might savour lines in a novel, and quite possibly is a result of these visuals “[holding] more meaning [for] the children” (Mourão, 2006: 57). This is an excellent reason to give children the opportunity to interact with a picturebook repeatedly, so they can return to favourite illustrations and comment on them.

Figure 2 shows the list of initial identifications and labels made in the L1, which were gradually replaced by their equivalent in the L2. The columns represent the three schools; the rows indicate whether the words they used came from the visual, verbal or both texts and whether they were previously known in English or not.

	<b>School 01</b>	<b>School 02</b>	<b>School 03</b>
<b>Verbal text</b>	Good night	Good night	Good night
<b>Previously unknown</b>			
<b>Visual and verbal texts</b>	Gorilla, Hyena, Armadillo, Dear, Zoo	Gorilla, Hyena, Armadillo, Dear, Zoo	Gorilla, Hyena, Armadillo, Dear, Zoo
<b>Previously unknown</b>			
<b>Visual and verbal texts</b>	Lion, Elephant, Giraffe	Lion, Elephant, Giraffe	Lion, Elephant, Giraffe
<b>Previously known</b>			
<b>Total L2 labels</b>	9	9	9
<b>Visual text only</b>	Zookeeper, Balloon, Banana, Key, Asleep, Wife, Surprised	Zookeeper, Key, Banana, Mouse, Cage, Wife, Eyes	Zookeeper, Key(s), Balloon, Mouse, Run
<b>Previously unknown</b>			
<b>Visual text only</b>	Mouse, Parrot, Bike, Ball, Little, Monkey	Bike, Ball, Blue, Yellow, Doll, Surprised, Happy, Sad, Monkey	Good bye, Banana, Teddy, Bike, Open, Ball, Living- room, Bedroom, Shoes
<b>Previously known</b>			
<b>Total L2 labels</b>	13	16	14

*Figure 2: Identifications and labels in L1 during the RRAs of Good Night Gorilla!*

Discussing the first two rows, we can see that the children used all the words in the verbal text as labels for the visual text. This was undoubtedly due to the repetitive aspect of the verbal text, as well as its simplicity: “good night” plus noun. However, the amount of labels pertaining to the visual text only is greater. Children constantly identified and labelled what they saw in the illustrations. All schools referred to the “zookeeper”, “banana” and “key”, as well as “ball” and “bike”, the latter two already known to all children. In addition, each school labelled a variety of other items, depending on what they already knew, reflecting their personal and/or group linguistic repertoires and interests.



### 6.1.2.2. Describing action

Describing action is a characteristic response of children who are non-readers and, along with labelling, is included in emergent reading schemes as one of the responses related to picture-governed behaviour. It is recognized by Sipe (2000) in his theory of literary understanding, and was also evident in the observations made in this study. Describing action occurred far less than labelling but it is still an important aspect of the analysis of illustrations and due to the picture-word dynamic and the many wordless spreads of *Good Night Gorilla!* children naturally wanted to talk about the illustrations as they looked at them. Children gave running commentaries describing the action as they followed the zookeeper around the zoo and into his house. This was particularly evident on the wordless spreads. An example from School 02 includes a sentence, which became very common as a description of action on opening 13, “*A mulher está surprised e a gorilla está happy*” (Trans: The woman is surprised and the gorilla is happy). The children in this group already knew the adjectives for emotions and so they inserted those in English into their Portuguese description.

As we can see, the act of labeling, identifying and describing action afforded many opportunities for L2 use, as it permitted children to use content words they either knew or had begun to acquire over the RRAs. The fact that the visual and verbal texts overlapped to a certain extent, enabled children to transfer what they heard and remembered from the repetitive verbal text into their labelling of the visual. Children fixated on certain visual aspects and repeatedly returned to them over the RRAs. This fixation appears to support a gradual move from the L1 to the L2, arising from the constant paraphrasing of L1 utterances into the L2 by the teacher, combined with more and more children using the L2 equivalent to make the reference. The result is that the group hears the label or formula in the L2 more often than they hear it in the L1, so much so that the L2 label becomes “the” label which everyone in the group uses to refer to a particular object or event in an illustration.

### 6.1.3. Analysis of story language

Analysis of story language includes children's responses to the verbal text in its oral form, as well as any responses that focussed on the graphic features of the verbal text.

#### 6.1.3.1. Savouring the verbal text

Sipe and Bauer describe children “[savouring] the language of the story by repeating words and phrases after the teacher had read them aloud, or chanting during familiar and repetitive parts of the story” (2001: 336). *Good Night, Gorilla!* contained a predictable verbal text and this meant that it was very quickly memorized and used by the children. They enjoyed chanting the greeting throughout the picturebook and during all RRAs.

#### 6.1.3.2. The graphic features of the verbal text

Children noticed the graphic features of the verbal text as it was in speech bubbles, making the print salient (Justice et al, 2005). Children pointed at the speech bubbles as they chanted the greetings. They repeatedly insisted they knew how to read what was there, “*Eu sei ler good night elephant*” (Trans: I know how to read good night elephant!). Very typical was the association between the greeting and the speech bubbles on opening 11, which was a black illustration with seven speech bubbles on it. Children would chant “Good

night!” and point to the speech bubbles, often pointing with their finger in a left to right direction, showing they knew that reading (in English and in Portuguese) moves from left to right.

#### 6.1.4. Analysis of book as object

This sub-category saw children engaging in discussion around the picturebooks developing an understanding and appreciation of the book as object (see Mourão, 2012b). This involved talking about the parts of a picturebook (e.g. covers, dedication, title pages), as well as learning that the picturebook was illustrated and authored by someone. There was evidence that these discussions were important in the development of the children’s literary understanding as well as their communicative competence, the latter shown in the way they were able to bring referential and social meaning to their language use. An example being a discussion round the dedication, “For Mr. and Mrs. Joseph McQuaid, and all their little gorillas”, which involved the children discussing the odd sounding name (McQuaid) and wondering why they had gorillas. Together they decided that maybe the gorillas were children, who behaved like gorillas!

Helping children to understand that a book can be created by someone for someone is an important step in recognizing authorship and one school in particular ensured they looked for dedications in every book they looked at after discovering dedications in their English books.

#### 6.1.5. Analysis of (linguistic) codes

This final sub-category is not part of Sipe's original theory as he was working with L1 groups. Analysis of (linguistic) codes constitutes any response that indicates children are actively considering one or other, or both of the codes at their disposal: the L1 and the L2. The act of thinking about two codes demonstrates a developing metalinguistic awareness. Regarded as an example of this response was any evidence of children confirming they had understood an L2 word or phrase by immediately translating it into the L1, or vice versa; querying certain L1 or L2 words; showing they knew when an L2 word should be used, either by asking peers to help them remember or by correcting peers and encouraging them to remember. Further examples showed children recognizing that words sounded like something else they already knew as well as reflecting on the way certain words were used and in what context. Finally, on occasions children actually extended and schematized their own active L1 vocabulary through discussions around illustrations, an example being the children’s acquisition of the Portuguese word for “armadillo”, which none of them knew. The children in School 03 had an interesting discussion about the word “armadillo”, the transcription follows.

- |         |   |
|---------|---|
| Child 1 | <i>Este é muito mais difícil</i> (Trans: That one is more difficult)  |
| Child 2 | Armadillo [To Child 1]  |
| Child 3 | <i>O elefante e o monkey é bué de fácil . [to child 4] não é?</i> (Trans: The elephant and the monkey are easy peasy, aren’t they?) |
| Child 1 | <i>Ó Sandie esse animal é mais difícil de dizer em Inglês</i> (Trans: Sandie that animal is more difficult to say in English)       |
| Teacher | <i>Tens razão dizer armadillo é complicado . não é?</i> (Trans: You are right, saying armadillo is complicated isn’t it)            |
| Child 5 | <i>Os mais facéis é monkey e elephant.</i> (Trans: the easiest is monkey and elephant)  |
- (School 03, *Good Night, Gorilla!*, RRA 7, opening 06)

We can see that they had opinions about what was easy and what was difficult, and this difficulty may be related to the fact that they did not know what an armadillo was in Portuguese, so they not only struggled with the name but the concept as well.

## **6.2. The intertextual response**

The intertextual response, together with the analytical response, constitute the hermeneutic impulse. This response is concerned with connections between the picturebook and another text, such as another picturebook, a film on TV or a DVD, a television programme, or another culturally recognized product like a rhyme, or a chant. Sipe (2000) describes children using an intertextual response to predict, compare and interpret a story, “the text is understood in the context of other texts, functioning as an element in a matrix of unrelated texts” (p. 268). The texts referred to in this study can be divided into two types, those from the children’s L1 world, and those from their L2 world (their English lessons).

### **6.2.1. Other texts in the L1 world**

*Good Night, Gorilla!* prompted children to remember other gorillas they knew in films or books. One child recounted the story of *King Kong* which he had seen, “*Eu vi um filme com um gorila que partiu a asa do avião (...) e morreu*” (Trans: I saw a film with a gorilla that broke an aeroplane’s wing (...) and he died). Additionally children recognized the toy elephant in opening 03 and made the intertextual connection to *Babar*, who they were familiar with from the TV programme they all watch. This particular connection was a deliberate inclusion by Peggy Rathmann, so the children acted as implied readers (Iser, 1978), following the clues left them by the picturebook creator.

### **6.2.2. Other texts in the L2 world**

This response is related to the way children linked previous learning from other texts shared during the English activities to the RRAs. Children very successfully incorporated words and formulaic phrases they had been exposed to through other stories, picturebooks, games and songs and chants, to describe illustrations and create significances. Any use of a word or phrase from another context of English is thus considered an intertextual reference.

The accumulation of language that passed between picturebooks was particularly interesting. For example, School 01 referred to the toys in the cages using “little” - “little gorilla”, “little hyena”, “little giraffe” - which is a direct transposition from the verbal text of a picturebook they had they had just finished sharing together, in which the verbal text included “... a little cat just like Jasper”.

The act of transferring formulas from one text to another is comparable to early L1 development theories. Tomasello (2003) states that children use conventional linguistic expressions to communicate symbolically by extracting elements to be used in utterances pertaining to other linguistic contexts. This involves the sophisticated act of “segmentation” (Tomasello, 2003: 38), that is, extracting from a speech stream the exact bits which fit the new context and its communicative intention. In the L1, children are said to start doing this around their first birthday (Tomasello, 2003), so this is an example of the early steps of L1 development being replicated in these first steps of L2 development.

## **6.3. The personal response**

The responses in this category demonstrated a direct connection to the children's own lives and this was shown in a number of different ways. Children provided unelaborated comparisons to personal experiences,

gave opinions based on personal preferences, brought their understanding of the world at that moment into discussions and allied with the picturebook characters. What these responses all had in common was that they brought the children emotionally closer to the picturebook through the sharing and expanding of experiences. Sipe describes these seemingly trivial personal connections as “the crucial foundation” (2008:153) for later more sophisticated literary interpretation.

#### 6.3.1. Children made unelaborated comparisons to personal experiences

The contributions in this sub-category included a reference to something similar at home or at school. Children described the gorillas they knew, going to the Lisbon Zoo, swinging on tyre swings and watching films with gorillas in them. An example of personal connection worthy of sharing occurred while the children were describing the animals in the zookeeper's bedroom on spread 10, where a child referred to the drawer in the side table, where the mouse was sleeping in as, “*A gaveta das cuecas*” (Trans: The knicker drawer). The comment was not really meant for any one, the child was talking to himself, confirming that in his life that drawer, next to his bed, is where he keeps his underwear. He was connecting with the illustration in his own personal way.

Additionally, other visual elements cemented a personal understanding of certain aspects of the illustration, as well as forged links between knowledge and understanding of the world already acquired. The following excerpt shows how a group of children talked their way around an illustration which showed some signposts on opening 2.

Maria *É uma torneira* (Trans: It's a tap)

Martim *É as setas onde eles estão* (Trans: It's the signposts for where they are)

Júlio *Se não tem setas as pessoas não sabem onde é que estão os outros* (Trans: If there aren't signposts people don't know where the others are)

(...)

Miguel *Na estrada também tem setinhas para indicar o sítio dos bombeiros o hospital* (Trans: On the road there are also signs to show the way to the fire station the hospital)

(School 02, *Good Night, Gorilla!*, RRA 5, opening 02)

As we can see from this example, Maria was not able to decipher the illustration, but once Martim had labelled the objects as signposts (*setas*) they prompted personal memories of all signposts in Miguel's experience and he was able to connect his prior understanding of their function with those he saw in the illustration.

In both these examples children's comments came after a number of repeated exposures to the picturebook in class, in RRA7 and RRA5, and show that repeated exposure to picturebooks not only help children pick up the verbal text, but also enable and foster the appearance of discussion and comments which show children are both questioning and connecting via the illustrations in a number of different ways.

#### 6.3.2. Children gave opinions based on personal preferences

It was typical of children to make alliances with different characters in the narratives. Some children called out excitedly during the RRAs, visibly taking great pleasure from thinking of themselves as a character in the picturebook. Several boys said they were the gorilla!

### 6.3.3. Children brought their understanding of the world at that moment into discussions

Certain children enjoyed sharing information they knew, in particular about the animals in this picturebook. When they saw the illustration of the lion in his cage, surrounded by bones, individuals mentioned they liked meat too and that “*o leão é fera*” (Trans: the lion is a wild animal). This information may appear superfluous, but for the child making the statement it is an important piece of information, one they have thought about and understood in relation to what they are seeing.

These personal responses contributed to turning response into an event through the process of engagement (Rosenblatt, 1995), where “the [beholder] brings to the work personality traits, memories of past events, present needs and preoccupations, a particular mood of the moment, and a particular physical condition (1995: 30) as well as acquired knowledge which they naturally want to share.

## 6.4. The transparent response

Falling into the aesthetic impulse, the transparent response is a receptive one, representing a “lived-through experience” of the book, where children “surrender to the power of the text” (Sipe, 2000:270). The story world and the children's world merge to become one, resulting in unconstrained responses. The transparent response was calculated between 3% and 9% of the children's responses. It was made up of a genuine emotional response, adding sound effects and spontaneously dramatizing scenes, interacting with the story characters and reliving the experience.

### 6.4.1. A genuine emotional response, sound effects and dramatizations

A genuine emotional response included the children's demonstration of surprise, delight, disgust or empathy. This took place throughout the picturebook, with children squealing, laughing, calling out and looking on in shocked silence. A typical example is when the children made snoring sounds on opening 17 when the gorilla is seen sleeping. They also physically dramatized certain events as they saw them in the illustrations, like bending their heads down to imitate the giraffe entering the house, pretending to drag something heavy imitating the mouse carrying the banana, or opening their eyes wide like the wife when she sees the animals in her bedroom. These responses showed that children were completely engaged in the story world as participants.

### 6.4.2. Interacting with the story characters

This response showed children actually communicating with the characters in the story. I have already shared the example of children warning the gorilla on opening 13, when the wife discovered the animals in the bedroom, calling out “*Foge gorila!*” (Trans; Run gorilla!). One child yawned whenever he saw the zookeeper and frequently said, “*Eu também estou com sono*” (Trans: I'm sleepy too).

### 6.4.3. Reliving the experience

Children regularly requested that either parts of the story or the whole picturebook be re-read. This occurred in particular on opening 11 of *Good Night, Gorilla!*, a black illustration with seven speech bubbles on it all saying “Good night!”. Here all groups enjoyed hearing and imitating the different voices of the animals as they chorused “Good night” together seven times.

In all, the transparent response was a mixture of unconstrained, emotional and physical responses, which often accounted for more dramatic, sometimes uncontrollable behaviour. If considered a legitimate response, and one that demonstrates involvement (Portugal & Laevers, 2010), it becomes constructive as opposed to destructive in its contribution to the read aloud experience. This response also contributes to understanding

why children respond the way they do to certain parts of a picturebook and to making it legitimate. As teachers, we often want children to sit quietly and listen carefully during a shared picturebook experience. Yet this response is instrumental to the children's own understanding of the picturebook, in particular in relation to the other responses. Sipe (2008) described his wonder at children's ability to immerse themselves in a picturebook, to be “in-the-storyworld” and yet just as quickly step out, into the real world, and “critique, analyze and evaluate the text” (Sipe, 2008: 173). Three children in School 03 did just this during RRA 4:

Bruno	<i>Foge</i> (Trans: Run)
Rui	<i>Não foge nada</i> (Trans: Nah, don't run)
Ana	<i>Foge foge</i> [jumping up and down] (Trans: Run, run)
Teacher	Run run gorilla . run [turn page to opening 14]
Rui	<i>Ela não vai bater com a vassoura</i> (Trans: she's not going to hit with the broom)

(School 03, *Good Night, Gorilla!*, RRA 4, openings 13/14)

Bruno and Ana are “in-the-storyworld” responding spontaneously, engaged and involved, and yet Rui has stepped out and is trying to bring them back to reality, he knows that the gorilla doesn't have to run, for the woman is not going to chase him with a broom - his second utterance is sarcastic, which was typical of this particular child in interactions with peers (and adults for that matter). This is his critique of the text in the knowledge that the gorilla will return with the wife, from the zoo.

### 6.5. The performative response

The difference between the performative and the transparent response is that this response involves some form of pre-meditation, using the picturebook as a platform for a personal creative purpose. Sipe (2000) considers the performative response to be almost “subversive” (p. 267) and invariably diverging from the storyline.

An example from this picturebook comes from when the teacher was encouraging the children to remember the word “wife” after they had called her “*a mulher*” (Trans: the wife). A child who liked to make jokes, called out “Maria”, a common Portuguese name often associated with sweethearts, wives or women in general. It made everyone laugh, as he knew it would!

The performative response required pre-meditation and thought, and involved few children, but those it did entail were children whose character it suited. It was a response that occurred in the L1 in the majority of cases, but not always. It exhibited enjoyment, creativity, satisfaction and often energy: it implied playing with language and shows that children were motivated, and thus likely to be within their zone of proximal development.

Most importantly, once we understand that both the transparent and the performative responses, considered enactments of the aesthetic impulse, are legitimate responses, we can begin to accept and value these responses when picturebooks are shared during L2 activities. Children are often chastised for calling out, moving or making sounds that are not considered appropriate, or accused of disrupting what a teacher might consider serious meaning making. In essence, these children are living the story and this is surely contributing to meaning making, and something to be encouraged and entertained in our classrooms, especially when it uses a child's linguistic repertoire, either the L1 or the L2. One of the objectives of early language learning is for children to eventually manipulate the L2 for their own enjoyment and the performative response can be just that when it involves the L2, a demonstration of how a child is able to manipulate codes.

## 7. Linguistic repertoires in action

Most of the excerpts selected to exemplify the results of this study show that the children used both the L1 and the L2 together in a sentence. It is an accepted approach to learning during English activities in these schools, and thus normal practice in the repeated read aloud sessions. The children's examples showed the insertion of L2 content words within an L1 sentence was consistent. This demonstrates that their behaviour was seen as a "socially constructed norm" (Lüdi, 2003: 186) while interacting with relevant others during English activities.

Inserting an L2 word into an L1 sentence is an example of "intra-sentential code mixing" (Appel & Muysken, 1987: 118), or "code-switching", the "alternating use of two or more 'codes' within one conversational episode" (Auer, 1998: 1). Thus, children actively incorporated material from both known languages within their linguistic repertoire to create a communicative act, resulting in a "phrase that makes reference to a single unified notion" (Dulay et al, 1982: 115). Children recognized that their classmates would share the notions they discussed, so they felt at liberty to code-switch. Through using the two codes, children showed an awareness that the L1 and the L2 are directly exchangeable in certain places within an utterance (e.g. noun for noun), and that their resulting bilingual utterance still made sense. Franceschini (1998) regards this as a "plurilingual practice" (p. 52) arising from contact with another language, and it is considered typical in children, who often substitute an L1 noun, adjective or sometimes even a verb, with its L2 equivalent.

What can be seen in these bilingual utterances is children making the most of the "general characteristic of language i.e. variability in use (...) and flexibility in behaviour" (Francheschini, 1998: 52). The use of the two codes is a plurilinguistic approach to language use, a use we can possibly conclude leads to increasing a child's linguistic repertoire as well as to language development (Wells, 2009).

## 8. Concluding thoughts and implications for our EFL classrooms

Seen as a whole, when used to analyze the children's responses, Sipe's categories create a basis for our understanding of how and why the children respond as they do during RRAs. The results I have shared in this paper occurred with one particular picturebook and three groups of children. The exact same responses would not necessarily be evident with other picturebooks or with other children, but response is guaranteed. Children, in particular young children, respond spontaneously and Sipe's categories enable us to recognize what these responses are and how they support children's meaning making and their creation of personal or group significances. No one group responded in exactly the same way, and so results in terms of English production differed across the groups, but they were all successful in one way or another in being able to accompany the picturebook, retell its verbal text as well as make reference to things in the illustrations in English.

Implications for our classrooms are numerous. The first I wish to highlight is the importance of recognizing how the different responses can support children's literary understanding, which will in turn support language use. Allowing children to engage with the picturebook during shared read alouds is allowing them to create their own texts, to take control of a story and make it their own. We are all guilty of taking a picturebook into the classroom and assuming that it contains one story, our story. Yet, as we saw from the results described, the children in the different groups responded in different ways to the

picturebooks and different language emerged for these responses. We need to value this difference and this evidence of interpretation.

The second implication resides in allowing illustrations in picturebooks to provide opportunities for language use and development. Selecting picturebooks for their synchronizing illustrations is supportive of language learning, but picturebooks with a more complex picture-word dynamic provoke extended discussion and meaning making. Additionally, picturebooks that include a repetitive verbal text provide opportunities for language use through imitation of this verbal text as well as discussion around the visual text, thus expanding the children's linguistic repertoire beyond the habitual focus on the verbal. Picturebooks that contain wordless spreads, or illustrations that do not synchronize with the words, are rarely chosen for EFL classes. This needs to be reconsidered at all levels of education and not just with very young learners. The more advanced a student's language level is, the greater the reason to use picturebooks that promote discussion and interpretation providing authentic reasons for L2 use in a classroom context.

A third implication is related to the repetition of the read aloud activity, which provided extended opportunities for children to analyse narrative meaning and gain deeper understandings of what they are seeing and hearing. RRAs also afford an evolution in language use through repeated opportunities for children to produce L1 and L2 utterances as well as successful intra-sentential code-switched utterances. Additionally, children are able to use the L1 as a framework for later L2 use due to the prospects of re-encountering similar opportunities for comments and talk.

The fourth implication is related to the use of the children's linguistic repertoires. The children in this study were pre-primary children in low exposure contexts. The discussions prompted through the engaging with the illustrations could only have been in Portuguese. Nevertheless, use of the children's L1 was seen to support later L2 use. This should be nurtured in such contexts and not ignored. In high L2 exposures children would be more likely, and encouraged, to use English in their responses.

Picturebooks are an underused resource and our recognition of the different responses and how they can support development of literary understanding and L2 use is embryonic. I hope that this article has led to a reconsideration of how we should be using these books with our language learners.

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